

Editor's Notes

It's a great pleasure to feature Marilyn Taylor in this issue of *Folio*. Marilyn Taylor was named Poet Laureate of the City of Milwaukee in 2004 and 2005, and in 2009 was appointed to a two-year term as Poet Laureate of the state of Wisconsin. She is the author of six collections of poetry, most recently *Going Wrong* (2009). Her poetry has also appeared in many anthologies and journals, including *The American Scholar*, *Poetry*, *Able Muse*, *Poetry Daily*, *Measure*, *Poemeleon*, and *Mezzo Cammin*. Taylor served as a Contributing Editor for *The Writer* magazine, where her widely read "Poet to Poet" column on the craft of poetry appeared bimonthly for five years. Taylor taught poetry and poetics for fifteen years at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Currently, she teaches community writing workshops throughout—and beyond—her home state of Wisconsin.

Poet A. E. Stallings, a 2011 MacArthur Fellow, has praised Taylor's work for its ability to tackle "the big themes: aging and death, love and its betrayals, the secrets lurking beneath the surface of family life," while poet and editor Ronald Wallace has described Taylor as an "effortless formalist" whose work ranges "from hilarity to heartbreak," and showcases her genius for finding "wisdom in the wisecrack, profundity in the pratfall, eloquence in the everyday." In this selection, readers will encounter rhythmically rich, unforgettably detailed poems that shine welcome light into the hidden corners of domestic and civic life.

Taylor is particularly attuned to the shifts of perspective that arrive with time's passage and gives voice to a compelling range of maternal experiences. Her verse transports readers through the dizzying range of emotions seemingly ordinary events can spark, from the child's memories of a mother ensconced in a suburban home (the "powdered presence" viewed from a "rain-glossed school bus"), to the adult's perceptive view of adolescent longing made mani-

fest when a seat-companion on a plane “turns and smiles/with pleasure at the girl across the aisle.”

This ability to inhabit multiple perspectives is amply displayed in “Family Picnic,” a poem that also reveals the deep-rooted empathy that underpins Taylor’s characteristic wit. In the opening stanza, the speaker evokes the intimacy of familial life, sharing the confidence that “Life hasn’t been easy for Betsy since turned/thirteen.” Taylor shifts her lens to bring the sulky teen into closer view:

just look at her, the sniffy way
 she sits all by herself, wincing with scorn
 at her noisy cousins lining up to play
 a pick-up softball game before the day
 runs out. *Childish*, she mutters from the chair
 in which she lounges, tossing back her hair.

Though adults soon join the game, Betsy maintains her “careful distance,” struggling mightily, as Taylor’s astutely drawn details imply, to negotiate the challenges of adolescent individuation within the bounds of gender expectations. The comedic aspects of these familiar struggles are further underscored by the pleasure of rhyme.

Poets frequently evoke the old truism that rhymes are scarce in English, especially when compared to the Romance languages from which our prosody is largely derived. Yet in the hands of skillful practitioners, this apparent dearth goes unnoticed. Taylor’s use of rhyme, slant rhyme, and assonance is stealthy and strategic, a means of upending expectations and recreating in readers a sudden shock of insight. When “Family Picnic” closes with the lines “. . . just in case we take her for that splendid child Betsy,/who left us only very recently,” she powerfully evokes a sense of passing time.

Growing up’s no picnic, and Taylor’s verse offers a humorous take on an adolescent’s transformation into the stranger a family no longer recognizes. Though the poem masquerades as “light verse,” this is an undeniably intelligent and finely crafted poem.

Whatever the triggering subject, Taylor’s view of maternal identity remains refreshingly honest. Empty nesters who endure the humble-bragging of their offspring will enjoy “Open Letter to Grownup Kids Who Call Home.” While the poem offers a satirical glance at parent-child relations, it also reveals a sometimes forgotten truth: that parents are in full possession of independent lives. Taylor’s willingness to confront the darker sides of maternal bonds is evident in “Sestina to My Mother,” “At the End,” and “In Other News,” all of which offer frank descriptions of maternal anger that young women must flee, regardless of the knowledge that such rage that is fueled by years of pain and

disappointment. With these poems, Taylor mines a tradition that hearkens back to fairy tales and murder ballads, evoking with stunning clarity the terrifying mix of fear and love implicit within the maternal archetype.

But darkness is not all. Taylor is equally engaged with another vital strand of literary tradition—one that posits poetry as a central force in civic life. Some of her most affecting poems respond to grieving mothers, especially those whose children have met untimely deaths through illness and war.

Though a poet often writes in solitude, one of the joys of verse is that it reflects our deepest kinship, offering a means of cultural preservation and communal consolation. Taylor is a gifted critic and lecturer whose reflections on poetry and motherhood (following the Folio) are lively, instructive, and not to be missed.

—Jane Satterfield